

# LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS: AN INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE

BY

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LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS: AN INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This paper examines the Army's perceived need for a "written" professional ethic. Through a "Profession of Arms Campaign," the Army intends to redefine itself as a profession and publish a professional ethic. The relevant literature asserts that current doctrine, values, oaths, and creeds are insufficient to guide ethical leader behavior. It cites marquee examples of ethical failures that might not have occurred had there existed a comprehensive professional ethic to guide leaders. While there are relatively few examples of this type, the hypothesis is that these failures constitute an Army ethic problem, not an individual leader problem.

This paper asserts to the contrary; that it is an individual leader problem. That Army leadership doctrine, while not perfect, is sufficient to guide leaders if it is understood, internalized, and modeled. It analyzes three of the marquee cases noted above through the lens of FM 6-22 Army Leadership. It shows that each "ethical" failure correlates directly to an individual leader's failure to adhere to current doctrine. Just as our doctrine is not perfect, neither are our leaders. As such, it offers a "realist" approach

to appreciating (and ultimately accepting) the fact that none of our leaders are perfect, and that not all are professional.



## LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS: AN INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE

The Army is in the midst of a year-long introspective “look in the mirror” entitled the “Profession of Arms Campaign” (PoAC). The purpose of the PoAC is to “...take a hard look at ourselves to ensure we understand what we have been through over the past nine years, how we have changed, and how we must adapt to succeed in an era of persistent conflict.”<sup>1</sup> The Commanding General of the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command, lead agent for the Army, published a PoAC White Paper in December 2010. In it we find three overarching questions to consider during CY 2011: What does it mean for the Army to be a Profession of Arms? What does it mean to be a professional Soldier? After nine years of war, how are we as individual professionals and as a profession, meeting these aspirations?<sup>2</sup> The challenge is answering these questions in a manner that’s useful, and usable, across the breadth and depth of the Army.

However, the Army’s approach appears more that of a manager or bureaucrat, than that of a leader. The PoAC White Paper and supporting relevant literature assert that the Army is experiencing professional ethic problems, and that current doctrine, values, oaths, and creeds are dislocated and insufficient to guide ethical leader behavior. The literature routinely cites a relatively small number of marquee examples of “ethical” leadership failures that might not have occurred had there existed a comprehensive professional ethic to guide leaders. Yet, the hypothesis is that these few failures constitute an Army-wide ethics problem. The perception is that an urgent need exists to reevaluate our values and publish a comprehensive, Army professional ethic.

This paper offers perspective to the contrary. It offers evidence that most Army problems, and specifically the oft-cited marquee examples, are individual leadership

failures. That Army leadership doctrine, while not perfect, is sufficient to guide leaders if it is understood, internalized, and modeled. To do this, the paper includes four major sections. First, it provides an overview of the PoAC and a brief discussion of ethics. Second, it reviews FM 6-22 Army Leadership. Third, it analyzes three of the marquee cases noted above through the lens of the current doctrine, showing that each case correlates directly to an individual leader's failure to adhere to current Army leadership doctrine. The concluding fourth section offers a "realistic" approach to appreciating (and ultimately accepting) the fact that no Army leader is perfect, and that not all are professional. That all Soldiers, regardless of rank, operate along a professional continuum.

### **The Profession of arms Campaign**

I was excited last January by the US Army War College's notification of the PoAC, accompanied by the White Paper and PoAC reading list. I began with the White Paper, anticipating a hard-hitting "Let's be honest with ourselves!" introspective opening shot across the bow. While well researched and written, with contributions from a wide range of highly credible and well-credentialed authors, it was not as expected. What I found were old definitions redefined, new definitions under development, and new lists of attributes - derived from old values and concepts - offered for consideration and professional dialog.<sup>3</sup> New phrases like "employ ethical combat power"<sup>4</sup> made me pause and think: "what's the real or perceived problem to which the Army is reacting?"

The recommended reading list, including the Military Review Special Edition of September 2010 (specifically compiled for the PoAC), did not offer any major surprises. The overarching theme: the Army is experiencing a wide variety of challenges. From a

dramatically changed strategic environment,<sup>5</sup> to an evolving operational focus,<sup>6</sup> to some rather high visibility incidents of unprofessional and unethical behavior by individuals and organizations<sup>7</sup>...the Army is searching for how best to address these challenges. Oddly enough, the more one reads the more one realizes that the Army has experienced very similar challenges in a cyclic manner since its inception.<sup>8</sup> The Army's latest response - or rather, reaction - at least as it appears constructed in the White Paper, is that we need to define - or redefine - the Army as a profession, Soldiers as professionals, have an Army-wide professional dialog, and capture it all in a single document titled 'The Army Professional Ethic' (or something close).

Not surprisingly, much of the PoAC's literature supports this assertion. Most link our ethical challenges to the lack of a written ethic. This view is summed up by Moten in his monograph, the second in a series on the Army's professional military ethic that General George W. Casey, Jr., Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, inaugurated in October 2009: "Yet, as this review of Army history and its current situation have shown, adherence to ethical standards is inconsistent. In part, the reason for lapses and inconsistencies is that the ethic has never been clearly and succinctly codified."<sup>9</sup> The belief is that an articulated ethic will significantly contribute to stemming our challenges with professional ethics. But with all that is already written - doctrine, regulations, creeds, and values - why would another document improve our consistent application of professional ethical standards?

The PoAC reading list and supporting literature is voluminous. Analyzing it all is well beyond the scope of this paper. There are, however, two key publications that appear to form the foundation of the campaign. The first is the PoAC White Paper

published by TRADOC in December 2010 to “kick-off” the campaign to occur throughout CY2011. The second, the Military Review Special Edition of September 2010, is a broad collection of ethic-oriented articles specifically compiled for the PoAC. Both publications generally assert that the Army’s current leadership and ethics doctrine inadequately addresses the ethical challenges of today’s operating environment. But leadership, as an action word, is sorely underrepresented in the PoAC literature and its application rests at the core of any ethical issue.

The reality of my experience over a 22 year career provides strong evidence, if anecdotal, to the contrary. With all that the Army requires of its leaders, another document to read and assimilate will not be the root cause for a far-reaching change in behavior or a more consistent application of ethical standards. Realistically, if what’s written now is not causing acceptable behavior, what’s at the heart of the issue? To most experienced Army leaders, it should be evident that the challenges outlined in the PoAC literature are “leadership” challenges (or shortcomings), not “we need a new one-page, consolidated, Army ethic” challenges. As such, an adequate response includes two key ingredients, a leadership oriented approach and a realistic perspective.

### **A Word About Ethic...or Ethics**

Ethic, or ethics, is very individual and very personal. The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy defines both terms as: “The branch of philosophy that deals with morality. Ethics is concerned with distinguishing between good and evil in the world, between right and wrong human actions, and between virtuous and non-virtuous characteristics of people.”<sup>10</sup> Important to note are the contextual terms within the definition: “human action” and “characteristics of people.”

Individuals “hold” or “follow” a very personal set of moral (or not so moral) principles, their personal ethic. Their personal ethic develops over the course of their life through their influences, experiences, and, to a lesser degree, education. Their personal ethic is internal, in part subconscious; it is who they are.

On the other hand, organizations “recognize” or “establish” rules of conduct, systems of values, or codes of ethics to govern or guide a group, such as a profession. The organizational ethic is external and applied; what the organization wants the individual to be. Ideally, individuals come to an organization with a personal ethic congruent with that of the organization. Often they do not, at least not perfectly so. Since an organizational ethic is externally applied, it requires the full measure of systematic teaching, coaching, mentoring, and modeling.<sup>11</sup> Where organizational and personal ethics diverge, their alignment takes effort and enforcement over time, with no guarantee of alignment or change. Why?

Because change of this nature is an individual choice, a decision. As John Maxwell asserts: “it’s an inside job.”<sup>12</sup> An individual must want to change. An internally imbued personal ethic is most often more compelling than an externally applied professional ethic. An individual must perceive value to be gained by modifying personal ethic to adapt to an organization’s ethic.<sup>13</sup> Because one’s ethic is normally difficult to observe, it is difficult to enforce change. As such, organizations should not be surprised when ethical breaches occur. To the contrary, they should understand and anticipate that ethical breaches will inevitably occur.

Take a simple example from the medical profession; arguably the oldest profession with the oldest ethical code.<sup>14</sup> In 2001, the American Medical Association

adopted a Declaration of Professional Responsibility - Medicine's Social Contract with Humanity,<sup>15</sup> a clarified and abridged version of the medical code of ethics. It is quite lofty and idealist. It states that physicians will "Respect...the dignity of every individual" and "Treat the sick and injured with competence and compassion." Now, consider one's experiences with doctors. Has a doctor ever failed to treat an individual with dignity, competence, or compassion? Of course, the answer is yes. People, even doctors, are not perfect. Nor are organizations perfect. As such, ethical breaches are inevitable, especially within large organizations.

### **FM 6-22 Army Leadership**

FM 6-22, formerly FM 22-100 before its revision in 2006, is the Army's keystone field manual on leadership. It establishes leadership doctrine and fundamental principles for all Army Soldiers and Civilians in all components.<sup>16</sup> While not perfect, it succinctly describes values-based leadership and the legal, moral, and ethical expectations of Army leaders.

Part One describes the basis of leadership. It defines leadership, roles, levels, and teams. More importantly, it explains the foundation of Army leadership as the founding documents of our nation, the civil-military linkage, the Army Values, leadership and command authority, and the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ALRM) (Figure 1). The ALRM forms the core of the manual's 2006 revision. The ALRM encapsulates in outline and graphic form the basic attributes and competencies expected of an Army leader. The remainder of the manual describes the ALRM in detail and depth for each leader attribute and core competency, using relevant and historical vignettes to clarify principles and concepts.

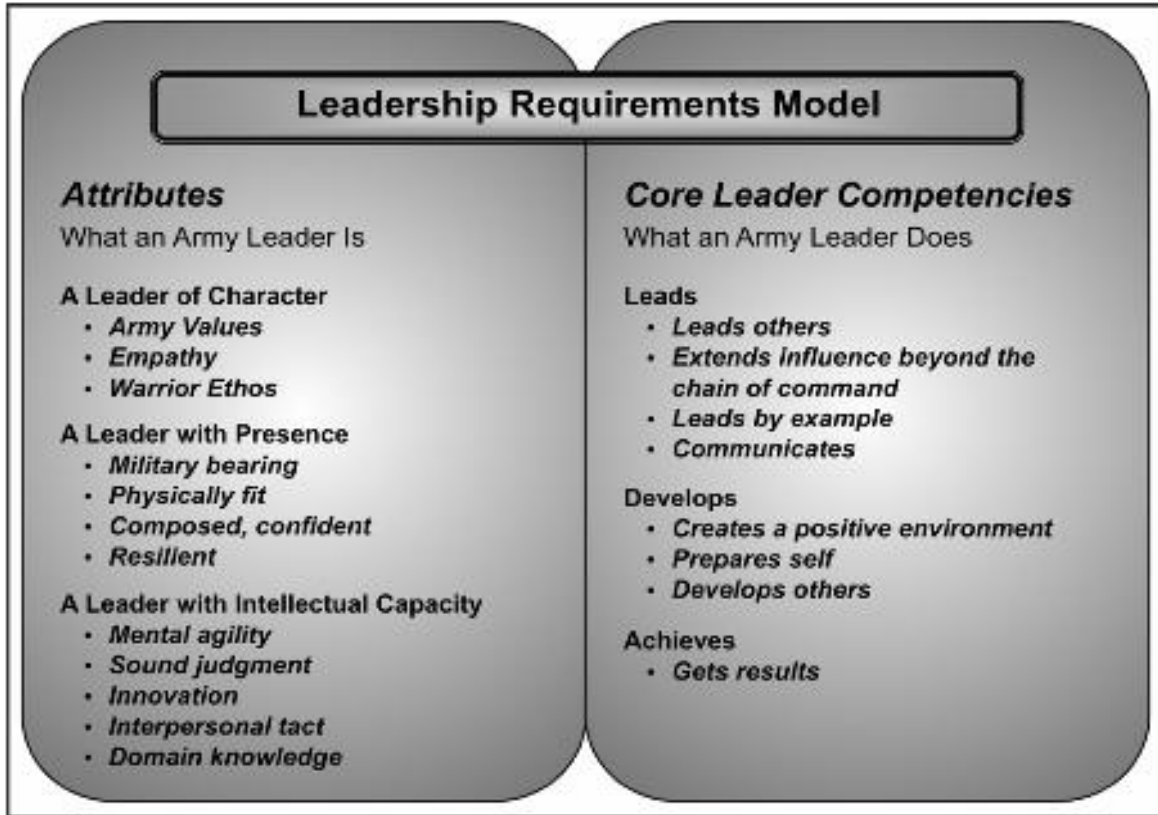


Figure 1. The Army Leadership Requirements Model

Part Two describes what an Army leader is: a person of character, presence, and intellect. It dedicates Chapter 4 to "Leader Character," articulating Army Values, empathy, Warrior Ethos, beliefs, and ethics. Of note, the Warrior Ethos receives some criticism in the PoAC literature, mostly for using the term "Warrior" as a descriptor. However, the manual is clear: "The Warrior Ethos requires unrelenting and consistent determination to do what is right and to do it with pride across the spectrum of conflicts. Understanding what is right requires respect for both comrades and all people involved in complex missions, such as stability and reconstruction operations. Ambiguous situations, such as when to use lethal or nonlethal force, are a test for the leader's judgment and discipline. The Warrior Ethos helps create a collective commitment to win with honor."<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the chapter ends with a section entitled "Character and

Ethics,” explaining ethical behavior, reasoning, and orders. Interestingly, it also points out that individual ethical behavior is a choice.<sup>18</sup>

Part Three explains the Army’s core leader competencies, categorized as leading, developing, and achieving, and describes influences on leadership. It specifically addresses displaying character and moral courage within the context of leading by example.<sup>19</sup> Leaders of character do “not have to worry about being seen at the wrong moment doing the wrong thing...it means putting the organization and subordinates above personal self-interest, career, and comfort. For the Army leader, it requires putting the lives of others above a personal desire for self-preservation.”<sup>20</sup> Additionally, in the context of developing others and a positive climate, the doctrine is clear: “Good leaders are concerned with establishing a climate that can be characterized as fair, inclusive, and ethical...Ethical means that actions throughout the organization conform to the Army Values and moral principles.”<sup>21</sup>

Part Four describes principles and techniques for leading at the operational and strategic levels within the framework of the Army’s core leader competencies. It asserts that a healthy ethical culture is the cornerstone of positive leadership and command climate.<sup>22</sup> The doctrine explains how healthy, values-based culture is a powerful tool for senior leaders, a tool that they can leverage to guide large, diverse organizations. And, states that, “Strategic leaders must be able to address the technological, leadership, and ethical considerations associated with conducting missions on an asymmetrical battlefield 12-14.”<sup>23</sup> To amplify the importance of ethics in action, the last section of the manual is aptly entitled “Accomplishes Missions Consistently and Ethically.” It charges



that leaders must monitor not only the progress of strategic vision and plans, but also adherence to values and ethics.<sup>24</sup>

This brief review of FM 6-22 shows that Army leadership doctrine principle-based and clearly articulated. The challenge is knowing, practicing, modeling and enforcing the doctrine. As stated previously, leaders are not perfect. As such, leadership failures occur across the spectrum of attributes and competencies. Whether deemed leadership failures or ethical failures, they are, at their core, individual failures.

### **Three Marquee Cases**

Throughout the PoAC reading list, are what have apparently become the marquee examples of the Army's professional challenges. Names like McChrystal,<sup>25</sup> and Tillman.<sup>26</sup> Terms like Abu Ghraib<sup>27</sup> and the Exodus of Mid-Grade Officers.<sup>28</sup> I don't intend to sift through each of these in great detail; much has already been written and you are likely very familiar with each already. But for introspective self-reflection, I urge you to consider one simple question... "Why?" Why did GEN McChrystal and his staff apparently disparage political and military leadership in an airport bar in the presence of a Rolling Stone reporter?<sup>29</sup> Why did leaders not immediately tell the truth regarding the circumstances surrounding the fratricide of CPL Tillman<sup>30</sup> as facts surfaced? Why didn't the leadership know what was happening in Abu Ghraib?<sup>31</sup> If they did, why didn't they take corrective action and report? Why does it appear that some of our best company-grade and mid-career officers are leaving the service?<sup>32</sup>

The obvious follow-up questions are: Are these individual, leader, organizational, or institutional issues? Have we ever experienced similar issues in our history? If so, how often? When? Cyclically? Is there a trend? What did we do? Did it work? Have

other professions experienced similar issues? What did they do? Did it work? Are these really issues that we can fix individually, organizationally, institutionally? And, if so, how? Or, do we simply work hard to develop the most professional Army possible, and then be brutally transparent with ourselves and society when we experience a loud hiccup? I'll not answer all these questions in this paper, instead we'll focus on the first question noted above within the context of three cases. The cases show that they are individual leader failures that relate directly to the attributes and competencies of the ALRM.

*Attribute - A Leader With Intellectual Capacity - Sound Judgement.* Michael Hastings won the George Polk Award for Magazine Reporting for his Rolling Stone piece, "The Runaway General," resulting in Gen. Stanley McChrystal's resignation. CSPAN2 broadcast a panel with recent Polk Award winners, including Hastings. As one watched the facilitator query the panelists with insightful and challenging questions regarding their award-winning writings, it appeared that all were proud of their work and calmly answered the tough questions.

Except one...Hastings. He was agitated, defensive, aggressive, and appeared unable to look the facilitator in the eye. Hastings body language indicated him untrustworthy, at least regarding the topic of McChrystal. Did he exhibit untrustworthy behavior when GEN McChrystal and his staff agreed to have him meet them in France or during the time he spent accompanying them to meetings and airports? Did McChrystal's staff check out Hastings before agreeing? Only those involved know for sure. However, it does create the conditions for a useful conversation about judgement.

As indicated in the ALRM, sound judgement is a trait found in a leader of intellectual capacity. Judgement is “the ability to judge, make a decision, or form an opinion objectively, authoritatively, and wisely, especially in matters affecting action; good sense; discretion; discernment: *a man of sound judgment*.”<sup>33</sup> FM 6-22, in the chapter on leader intelligence, dedicates a section to sound judgment. It asserts that good judgment comes from experience, and can be broadened and reinforced with self-development.<sup>34</sup> After Rolling Stone published the article, judgment became a widely discussed topic.

First, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates stated “I read with concern the profile piece on Gen. Stanley McChrystal in the upcoming edition of ‘Rolling Stone’ magazine. I believe that Gen. McChrystal made a significant mistake and exercised poor judgment in this case.”<sup>35</sup> Then, President Obama stated: “I think it’s clear that the article in which he and his team appeared showed poor judgment, but I also want to talk to him directly before I make any final decisions.”<sup>36</sup> Even GEN McChrystal stated: “It was a mistake reflecting poor judgment and should never have happened.”<sup>37</sup>

Comments by Hastings himself allude to the questionable judgment of the General and his staff. By Hastings’ own account, he simply emailed McChrystal’s staff requesting access and an interview. To his surprise, they agreed. Hastings “didn’t think [he] was was going to get access at all...one of those strange journalistic twists.”<sup>38</sup> Even more curious to Hastings was that “...a lot of the reporting that is getting most of the attention happened right away in the first few days in Paris. So I was surprised—because they didn’t know me.”<sup>39</sup>

So, how does a senior leader and his senior staff have such a failure in judgment? The doctrine is clear and available. Their experience level is well above average. So, how does this happen? Simply, individual leadership failures. Three stand out in this case. First, the general and his staff clearly participated in, or at least tolerated, banter of this type over a long time together. All being senior leaders, any one of them - early in the relationship - could have exercised sound, mature judgment and squelched the banter. Obviously, no one did. Second, the staff's poor judgment resulted in an unknown reporter from a less than scholarly periodical getting too close and familiar with themselves and their boss. Third, they were so comfortable with their banter and unwitting with the reporter that they failed to exercise appropriate judgment, and cease banter in the presence of the reporter. Not one leader interceded at any point.

An Army problem? Not according to the doctrine. This is the poor judgment of individuals, and a small, tight-knit inner circle. These senior military officers should be aware that they represent their organization and the Army at all times, but should be especially aware in the presence of the media. Even the most trivial banter has the potential to result in significant, potentially strategic, consequences. "Senior leaders are strategic communicators whose words and actions count. Comments by leaders set the tone and the climate within organizations — for good and for bad — and they are never neutral."<sup>40</sup> The Army expects its leaders to display good judgement. And every leader, regardless of rank, is responsible for its exercise, even if it means an on-the-spot correction...of the boss.

*Competency - Leads Others - Enforcing Standards.* How does one explain forcing detainees to construct naked human pyramids, and then recording such an event with photos? Even better, how did the situation at Abu Ghraib reach such a state? What were the indicators that should have alerted leaders to illegal and unethical activities? Who was checking and enforcing standards. Apparently, nobody. Therefore, if nobody checks, then nobody alerts, and nobody enforces the standards. Subsequently, a new, lower standard is set that, left unchecked, incrementally exacerbates the situation exponentially. Simple to say, tough to do.

On this topic, the doctrine is clear: "Proper supervision is essential to ensuring mission accomplishment to standard. It is an integral part of caring for Soldiers. The better they know their unit and subordinates, the more they can strike a balance for finding the details."<sup>41</sup> However, the Department of the Army's (DA) official investigation into the Abu Ghraib found that "...leaders at Abu Ghraib failed to execute their assigned responsibilities. The leaders from units located at Abu Ghraib or with supervision over Soldiers and units at Abu Ghraib, failed to supervise subordinates or provide direct oversight of this important mission. These leaders failed to properly discipline their Soldiers. These leaders failed to learn from prior mistakes and failed to provide continued mission-specific training."<sup>42</sup>

The DA investigation determined that although senior officers did not personally commit abuse at Abu Ghraib "they did bear responsibility for lack of oversight of the facility, failing to respond in a timely manner to the reports from the International Committee of the Red Cross and for issuing policy memos that failed to provide clear, consistent guidance for execution at the tactical level."<sup>43</sup> The doctrine clearly reinforces

this finding. First-line leaders supervise through direct supervision. Senior leaders supervise through checks and inspections. “Focused checking minimizes the chance of neglect or mistakes that may derail a mission or cause unnecessary casualties. Checking also gives leaders a chance to see and recognize subordinates who are doing things right or to make on-the-spot corrections when necessary.”<sup>44</sup> At Abu Ghraib, no one was checking.

Unsurprisingly, the DA investigation asserts that “the primary causes [of detainee abuse] are misconduct (ranging from inhumane to sadistic) by a small group of morally corrupt soldiers and civilians, a lack of discipline on the part of the leaders and Soldiers of the 205th MI BDE and a failure or lack of leadership by multiple echelons within CJTF-7.”<sup>45</sup> Here again, the doctrine is clear: “Leaders who consistently enforce standards are simultaneously instilling discipline that will pay-off in critical situations. Disciplined people take the right action, even if they do not feel like it. True discipline demands habitual and reasoned obedience, an obedience that preserves initiative and works, even when the leader is not around or when chaos and uncertainty abound.”<sup>46</sup>

Abu Ghraib teaches much about what a leader, or leaders, should not do. It is not an Army-wide ethic problem, but an individual leader problem. As the DA investigation asserts: “Most importantly, leaders must see things first-hand and not neglect tasks that call for subjective judgment such as unit cohesion, discipline, and morale,<sup>47</sup>” and “Abuses would not have occurred had doctrine been followed and mission training conducted.”<sup>48</sup>

*Multiple Failures Across ALRM Attributes and Competencies.* Over the past fifteen years the Army, think tanks, and scholars produced much literature about the

Army's junior officer retention challenges, called the junior officer exodus. The authors cite many surveys that offer many insights into the top reasons that young officers choose to leave the Army. Overwhelmingly, the reasons relate directly to an attribute of competency prescribed in the ALRM. Or, more specifically, a leader's failure thereof. However, this notion is best summarized by John C. Maxwell in his book *Leadership Gold*. In it he dedicates an entire chapter to the notion that: "People Quit People, Not Companies."<sup>49</sup>

Some sources estimate that as many as 65 percent of people leaving companies do so because of their managers.<sup>50</sup> In a 2008 study, Langkamer and Ervin found that perceptions of leaders strongly influence the working environment...and that the leader dimension exerted the strongest influence on work attitudes and turnover intentions.<sup>51</sup> FM 6-22 devotes an entire chapter to "developing." Leaders are responsible to develop a positive environment, preparing [developing] self, and developing others. Doing this properly results in a positive command climate and a strong, ethical organizational culture. However, surveys show that many leaders are not adhering to the doctrine.

The terms micromanagement and zero-defects surface routinely over time in officer satisfaction surveys. In 1997, the Center for Army Leadership reported a broad perception of a "zero-defects" Army. In 1999, the Army Research Institute reported that "excessive micromanagement by superiors, and insufficient time and equipment for realistic combat training," were among the top reasons captains were opting to leave the service.<sup>52</sup> Because no one appreciates an environment described as such, Army doctrine addresses it directly.

FM 6-22 explains that leaders evaluate and develop subordinates fully through focused training and allowing them to learn from experience. “They avoid micromanaging [subordinates] while trusting and empowering them to think creatively and provide truthful answers and feasible options.”<sup>53</sup> The manual urges leaders to be open and imaginative and “to create an effective organizational learning environment. Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Instead, stay positive and learn from those mistakes.”<sup>54</sup>

Importantly, micromanagement and zero-defects translate into a negative command climate. This climate creates the perception that a leader is self-serving, whether true or not. Many surveys highlight this issue. One report asserted that young officers perceived that senior leaders were focused on what would make their careers successful, and were unconcerned with the welfare of their units and subordinates.<sup>55</sup> Another survey noted that: “Many [young officers] believe there needs to be a clean sweep of senior leadership”<sup>56</sup> and that “senior leaders will throw subordinates under the bus in a heartbeat to protect or advance their careers.”<sup>57</sup>

Beyond micromanagement and zero-defects, Army leadership doctrine clearly articulates the notion that leaders must be the example of character and the builders of positive climate. Leadership is about trust, responsibility, and accountability. FM 6-22 specifically states that: “Society and the Army look to commanders to ensure that Soldiers and Army civilians receive the proper training and care, uphold expected values, and accomplish assigned missions.”<sup>58</sup> And that Army leaders demonstrate strong character and take pride living up to the Army Values. “Living honorably, in line



with the Army Values, sets an example for every member of the organization and contributes to an organization's positive climate and morale.”<sup>59</sup>

Leaders have an immense impact upon the quality of a junior officer's organizational experience that transfers to his overall quality of life. Commanders at company, battalion, and brigade level are extremely influential in subordinate's career decisions. Not by trying to convince them to remain in service, but by creating a values-based command climate and a culture of character of which an officer can be proud, within which an officer wants to serve.<sup>60</sup> As stated, the doctrine is clear. Since Army officers are college graduates one would assume that reading, understanding, and implementing its' intent is an achievable objective. That some do not is simply an individual leader's failure to do what one is supposed to do.

So in response to these challenges, the PoAC White Paper's focus is on creating a document of cultural change that comprehensively describes the Army as a profession and its professional ethic. While a noble - and possibly necessary - goal, the question is: does this really treat the problem? Will a freshly published “Army Ethic 2011” cause us all to do the right thing? I don't think so. Defining the ethic is just one part of a complex relationship. Because more important than what's written, is who's reading it...are they professionals, or not? And, although some senior leaders may disagree,<sup>61</sup> the Army is a large organization and we just can't fix or even closely monitor each and every individual all the time. We must know first what a professional looks like, determine organizationally and then know how to purposefully, and consistently, grow them.

## **A Realistic Perspective on Professional Leadership**

A realistic perspective regarding the degree of professionalism one can have across the breadth and depth of a 1.2M person organization will greatly improve the general understanding of how and why leadership failures and ethical breaches occur. Offered here is an alternative, or additional, perspective to consider as the Army discusses our profession. Before the Army dives into the details of rewriting definitions and reorganizing values, it needs to begin with a clear, common understanding of the big picture – a straight-forward framework for professional dialog. As such, a significant first step is establishing our understanding of the relationship between a profession and its professionals (or non-professionals, as the case may be).

To do this, the Army must understand:

- 1) The criteria by which a type of work is judged a profession (expertise, education, ethic, standards, autonomy, service);
- 2) The traits an individual brings to a profession (character, passion, talent, motive);
- 3) The relationship that exists between a profession's criteria and an individual's traits (interaction, integration, assimilation);
- 4) That an individual falls somewhere along a professional continuum (job, career, profession).
- 5) That where an individual falls along the professional continuum is a choice; a decision that the individual makes either consciously or subconsciously.

Figure 2 graphically represents the professional continuum and relationships described above.

# The Professional Continuum

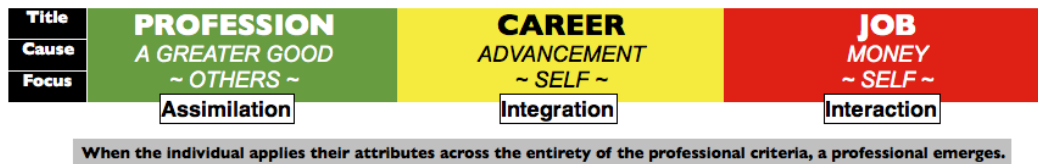


Figure 2. The Professional Continuum

Ask 100 experts, and you'll receive 100 different, but similar, definitions of the term *profession*. Doctors,<sup>62</sup> lawyers,<sup>63</sup> teachers,<sup>64</sup> public administrators<sup>65</sup> - and many, many other occupations - have undertaken a PoAC-like introspective drill. While each set of criteria may be worded a bit differently, they're well and simply captured by Webster's definition of a profession:

*A profession is: 1) a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive preparation including instruction in skills and methods as well as the scientific, historical, or scholarly principles underlying such skills and methods, maintaining by force of organization or concerted*

*opinion high standards of achievement and conduct, and committing its members to continued study and to a kind of work which has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service; 2) the act of openly declaring or publicly claiming a belief, faith, or opinion; an avowed statement or expression of intention or purpose; 3) a principle calling, vocation, or employment; 4) the whole body of persons engaged in a calling.*<sup>66</sup>

Simplified further, six primary attributes of a profession surface: expertise, education, ethics, standards, autonomy, and service. In exploring the Army's current challenges and issues in an era of persistent conflict and beyond, our dialog should treat all six attributes, not just ethic. Why? Because the attributes are inextricably interdependent. Therefore, a key component of the PoAC must be to clearly and simply define and describe each attribute as it applies to the Army. Doing so generates far more questions than answers.

Since our civilian leaders and the American people are the Army's constituency,<sup>67</sup> I'd first ask them: What expertise do you expect, need, want the Army to have? The National Security Strategy and the very recently published National Military Strategy are vague. It appears the Army needs to be good at everything - Soldiers, Diplomats, Politicians, Capacity Builders. However, it is difficult to explain to a new officer or enlistee their role in the nation and the world with nothing to sink one's teeth into. The Army needs to answer: What is to be our expertise, our "core competency(ies)"? What expertise or body of knowledge is specific to the Army, and only the Army, establishing it as a profession? How far does that expertise expand beyond fighting and winning the nations wars?

Similarly, Army education and ethics need their own introspective look as part of the PoAC. What does the Army expect of our initial entry and continuing professional education systems? Considering the substance of the challenges and issues previously noted, does the Army need to assess the balance between tangible (tactical and technical expertise) and intangible (character, ethic, passion, etc.) aspects of the curricula? If so, what changes should be made in education and training methodology? Is current doctrine, including Army Values and Warrior Ethos, relevant and useful? Do leaders understand the difference and the relationship between doctrine's principles and tactics, techniques, and procedures? And, what role does unit professional development and self development play? What do we expect or require? How do we monitor the quality, frequency, results, and value-added? Other professions require and track the completion of organizational and individual Continuing Education Credits.<sup>68</sup> Is this something we should consider?

And what of autonomy and service? Do we understand and appreciate our role and its degree of autonomy as subordinate to civilian leadership? Do we understand why we as a profession are a-political and how it relates to our autonomy? And do we understand the significant responsibility that comes with such autonomy, especially for a military organization. Do we really understand what service means and who we serve? As officers especially, who is included in the entirety of our constituency? Do we understand that failing one segment of our constituency often results in failing them all?

The challenge here is that much of that just discussed is influenced - on a daily functional basis - by the individual, not the profession.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, it is paramount to

understand what qualities the individual brings to the table and how leaders influence the development of these qualities within the context of the professional criteria.

### **What The Individual Brings To The Table**

All things considered, each person comes to the table with about four key traits character, passion, talent, and motive. Arguably, there could be more traits on the list. But in pondering these traits, those not included on the list - from my personal perspective - are embedded somewhere within the four key traits highlighted here. As such, discussing and reaching consensus on what these key individual traits are is, I believe, an important component of the PoAC. Why? Because it helps us to create a mental picture of what we are looking for in a person and a leader.<sup>70</sup>

It's important that we as a profession connect the interdependent dots between an individual's traits and the criteria of a profession. Why? It informs many aspects of the profession like recruitment, initial entry training, and professional development. And, probably more importantly, it informs our Army-wide initiatives and reforms. For example, we know that Human Resources Command is experimenting with the "Green Pages", a new strategic system to capture and manage the value of a Soldier's talent and experience. But is this work nested with Accessions Command's recruiting strategy and Training and Doctrine Command's training and leader development strategy? To even begin to link these strategies, we need agreement on what we are looking for, lest our efforts will never synchronize. So, let me explain my offering of character, passion, talent, and motive as the key traits we're looking for.

*Character.* Character matters, a lot.<sup>71</sup> In fact, it tops the list of what we're looking for in today's Army leader. Edgar F. Puryear, Jr. makes this abundantly clear in his

book *American Generalship - Character is Everything: The Art of Command*. He notes that many great generals - such as Washington, Lee, Marshall - are remembered not only as great leaders but as men of character.” Puryear quotes Henry L. Stimson, “who commented, ‘General Marshall’s Leadership takes its authority directly from his great strength of character’”<sup>72</sup> In a Soldier, it should be the sum of our Army Values, Warrior Ethos, and Oaths.

Character is: 1) the aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of some person or thing; 2) moral or ethical quality; 3) qualities of honesty, courage, or the like; integrity; 4) reputation, good repute.<sup>73</sup> Integrity is the foundation of one’s character. Character is the foundation of trust. Trust is the glue that holds organizations together and the mortar with which to construct great teams.<sup>74</sup> Therefore character is the single most essential trait that an individual brings to the table. It guides all other individual traits and effects the relationship between the individual and the criteria of the profession. We must learn how to identify it, strengthen it, and - when necessary - confront the lack of it.

*Passion.* In their seminal work *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner state that: “Exemplary leaders have a passion for their institutions, their causes, their technologies, their communities - something other than their own fame and fortune.”<sup>75</sup> Passion means different things to different folks, but it all boils down to powerful, positive, emotion. Passion is: 1) a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm, or desire for anything; 2) the object of such a fondness or desire; 3) any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling.<sup>76</sup>

The degree of passion that an individual brings to the table determines the intensity and enthusiasm with which his individual traits relate to the criteria of the profession. The more one leans toward being a professional, the greater their concern becomes for something bigger than themselves, and even bigger than the profession.<sup>77</sup> Passion motivates self and others. Passion combined with character and motive creates a climate of trust and energy. Passion fuels talent. We leaders must be able to exhibit and identify passion in our people and teams. Passion provides the energy for the positive application of all other individual traits, that's why it's on the list.

*Talent.* Of the four individual traits on the list, talent is probably the most visibly measurable. We can measure intelligence with academic grades. We can measure creativity with aptitude tests<sup>78</sup> and observation. We can measure physical ability with a fitness test. We can measure performance and experience with evaluations and reports. Talent is: 1) a special natural ability or aptitude; 2) a capacity for achievement or success 3) a power of mind or body considered as given to a person for use and improvement.<sup>79</sup>

Talent management is the focus of the Army's Green Pages initiative, as well as most of corporate America.<sup>80</sup> As important as it is, it is also elusive. Many folks don't know what their talents or strengths are. Many Army leaders don't know either - and clearly don't understand how to use and improve them - as evidenced in the cases above. The Army should understand how character, passion, and motive influence our talent and its improvement or atrophy. The PoAC we needs to address talent - how we identify it, strengthen it, manage it, and apply it.



*Motive.* Motive is: 1) something that causes a person to act in a certain way, do a certain thing, etc.; incentive; 2) the goal or object of a person's actions.<sup>81</sup> Why is motive important? Because it answers the question, "Why?" Why is an individual doing something - joining the Army, becoming an officer, taking a specific job. Motive provides the mental framework within which an individual approaches an endeavor, their intent. It explains how they approach their job, their boss, their peers, and their subordinates. It appears to be the strongest factor in determining whether an individual approaches their work as a job, a career, or a profession, which we'll discuss later.

As previously stated, John C. Maxwell asserts that: "People Quit People, Not Companies."<sup>82</sup> Some sources estimate that as many as 65 percent of people leaving companies do so because of their managers.<sup>83</sup> If an individual's primary goal is advancement, his people can tell. He'll "throw them under the bus"<sup>84</sup> to save his own reputation or career. He'll devalue them,<sup>85</sup> make excuses, be risk averse, and establish a zero-defects environment.<sup>86</sup> Arguably, selfish motive combined with weak character create the leadership environment found at the root of any discussion of the junior officer exodus.<sup>87</sup> It also either informs or answers many of the questions surrounding the Army's other marquee issues noted earlier.

As such, motive is a powerful influencer, certainly for the individual but also for the organization that they lead. You can initially hide it, as you can hide a weak character, perhaps for the first 30-60 days. But eventually, the subordinates and peers see through the facade.<sup>88</sup> The challenge is leaders being able to identify, and confront, selfish motive...especially when combined with weak character. Why? These individuals and their units often look good and smell good, on the surface. But when

one digs deeper, their subordinates will tell the rest of the story. That is why motive is one of the key individual traits that we must identify, develop, and if necessary, confront.

## **Relationships and Results**

This final explanatory section describes the three relationships that can exist between individual traits and professional criteria - interaction, integration, and assimilation, and the associated resultant position along the professional continuum - job, career, or profession.<sup>89</sup> I myself have tried to understand, and subsequently relate to others, how to analyze why people act the way they do...and more importantly, how their actions affect their organization and the Army.

*Interaction and the Job.* The simplest relationship that can exist between an individual and a profession is interaction. Interaction is reciprocal action, effect, or influence.<sup>90</sup> Interaction is a transaction more than a relationship. In an occupational context, interaction is an individual trading their time for money. In relation to the professional continuum, the individual is doing a job. A job is: 1) a piece of work, especially a specific task done as part of the routine of one's occupation or for an agreed price; 2) a post of employment; full-time or part-time position.<sup>91</sup> The individual is self-oriented, not particularly ambitious to advance - except to make more money, and is not concerned with a greater good. Interaction requires average character, minimal passion (if any), moderate talent, and we already know the motive, money. Interaction and doing a job is not a bad thing. We, as leaders, simply need to understand that the vast majority of our society exists in this category.

Therefore, we must also accept that some in our Army approach being a Soldier in the same manner. They're on the lower end of the professional continuum, maybe

10%-20% of uniformed members fall into this category. What does this Soldier - whether officer, NCO, or enlisted - look like? First, they are task and time-oriented. Their focus - when do I start, how long will it take to achieve the minimum acceptable standard, and when can I leave? Even if they happen to be in a leadership position, they really don't want to be in charge or accountable. They rarely think about their job when off duty. When they do it's usually concerning how their job is affecting them personally: working too late, not enough pay, don't want to deploy, impeding their social or family life...you get the drift. They will not likely perform professional self-development or physical training on their own. Again, this is not necessarily bad, we just need to know that these individuals are in our units and assign them responsibility, evaluate them, and promote them accordingly.

*Integration and the Career.* Integration is the next level of relationship between individual traits and professional criteria. I've not done an Army-wide survey, but believe that this is the largest segment of the professional continuum, maybe 60%-80%. Integration is: 1) behavior, as of an individual, that is in harmony with the environment; 2) the organization of the constituent elements of the personality into a coordinated, harmonious whole.<sup>92</sup> Integration occurs when an individual adapts their actions to advance within their occupational environment. They exist in the career category along the professional continuum. A career is: 1) a person's progress or general course of action through life or through a phase of life, as in some profession or undertaking; 2) a path or progress through life or history.<sup>93</sup> While they typically like their work, their focus is still primarily self - more recognition, more pay, more benefits, and advancement within their organization - or any organization - through retirement.<sup>94</sup>

Individuals in the career category, as compared to the job category, normally exhibit more character and passion, and are often infinitely talented and willing to self-develop. In this case, their motive is the key factor keeping them from crossing the line into the profession category. Although they may exhibit more concern about others and a greater good, they are still self-focused. This primarily affects decisions within and regarding their work. Within their work they appear individually rather than organizationally ambitious. They are risk-averse and self-protective as noted previously in the discussion of causes of the junior officer exodus. Decisions regarding their work, like selecting assignments, are normally focused on what they perceive as best for their advancement rather than what's best for their organization or the Army at large. Although easily hidden from superiors, their subordinates are normally well aware of their motive. Again, we leaders should train ourselves to recognize "careerists", and assign and promote them accordingly.

*Assimilation and the Profession.* The highest form of relationship between individual traits and profession criteria is assimilation. The individual traits peak in their specific capacities, and in their association with the professional criteria. This is the point at which they merge and become nearly indistinguishable. Assimilation is: 1) to learn (information, a procedure, etc) and understand it thoroughly; 2) to absorb (food) and incorporate it into the body tissues; 3) to become absorbed, incorporated, or learned and understood.<sup>95</sup> The resultant position along the professional continuum is at the level of Profession: a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive preparation including instruction in skills and methods as well as the scientific, historical, or scholarly principles underlying such skills and methods, maintaining by

force of organization or concerted opinion high standards of achievement and conduct, and committing its members to continued study and to a kind of work which has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service.<sup>96</sup>

A professional exists at the highest level of development of their character, passion, talent, and motive. Professionals are other-focused. The professional is concerned with advancement, but of their profession, not themselves. They understand, and completely embrace, the greater good and a higher calling. Decisions within their work advance their people, their organization, and the profession, regardless of risk to self. They serve where called. Yet, they may question decisions or authority especially if they perceive unprofessional motive. In all, they exhibit character-based judgement. They are committed to self and organizational development. They are unaware of a clock to punch. They, and their family, are an ambassador for their profession. These are the individuals that should reach the highest levels of leadership in our Army. The key is correctly identifying them, assigning them, and promoting them.

### So What Good Does All This Do Me?

I've undertaken this mental drill many times over the course of my career. Mostly looking in the mirror in brutal self assessment. Why? It helps me measure myself against clearly defined traits and criteria. Because it is important that we, as Army leaders, know ourselves, first. We must individually understand and decide where we fall along the professional continuum. We must then decide whether we intend to move along the continuum in one direction or the other. Do we improve our position to the point that we fall into the profession category? Ideally, that's the goal that lives within all of us. Realistically, we know that is not the case. Again, why is this important?

Because our Soldiers deserve our very best. If we intend to enjoy the privilege of leading Soldiers, our individual goal must be to achieve the level of professional, regardless of the decisions of those around us. If we all did this ourselves, and enforced it in some manner in others, we would not be undertaking a PoAC or concerned with compiling a new Army ethic.

However, I eventually began using this thought process to assess others. Why? Knowing your people - up, down, and laterally - is important, especially for achieving organizational success. Understanding that where an individual falls along the professional continuum is a choice, a decision that the individual makes either consciously or subconsciously, helps us understand how they think and their actions. It's important to try to understand how an individual approaches his work. It explains things like perceived level of commitment, loyalty to the organization and the Army, and quantity and quality of results. It effects a leader's decisions concerning trust, responsibility, and the ability to operate independently to name a few. It helps a leader determine where to assign people within the organization and, importantly, who will be part of his inner circle.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, knowing your people dramatically increases your ability to help them develop both as an individual and as a professional. It helps you understand where they are in their development along the professional continuum, to what degree you will have to be the catalyst for development, and possibly what to expect of their response to development. Knowing where they fall helps you create organizational professional development programs and recommend methods and resources for self-development.

It helps you to monitor their improvement, or lack thereof, and can help you avoid frustrating yourself and your people.

## **Conclusion**

So, what does this all have to do with the Profession of Arms Campaign? This paper offers two key take-aways. First, is the assertion that Army leadership doctrine, while not perfect, is sufficient to guide Army leaders. If read, understood, acted upon, and enforced, the result will be effective, ethical leadership. And, as the cases analyzed in this paper bear out, most challenges that the Army faces are not Army problems, they are individual leadership failures.

Second, is the offer of a framework within which to consider the Army as a profession. As stated previously, it needs to be clear, simple, and easily explained to every Soldier. Still it must be an intellectual enough to provide senior leaders with a tool to shape our future as a profession. By understanding professional criteria - expertise, education, ethics, standards, autonomy, and service as they relate to individual traits of character, passion, talent, and motive we can decide what they mean as applied to our Army. The potential discussion will surely be lively.

Toughest for Army leaders is the aspect of a given Soldier's professionalism that we must accept, free will. An individual chooses where they will fall along the professional continuum. We can provide education, training, mentoring, modeling and references, but the bottom-line is that each individual decides to what degree they bring their traits to the profession. Each individual decides whether they interact, integrate, or assimilate with the profession and its criteria. This can cause us frustration, and potentially lead to ill-informed personnel and operational decisions, is left unchecked.

I close with a relevant, descriptive story from my youth. I began spending time in my Dad's architectural office at about ten years old. I realized by about age fifteen that Architecture is a profession because, as a collective body, it establishes and maintains certain standards of performance and conduct<sup>98</sup>. Practicing Architecture in a professional manner, on the other hand, is a personal decision. I realized that a Registered Architect's License does technically make one a professional, it does not necessarily cause one to exhibit professional leadership skills.

The same exists in the Army today, and has throughout its history. A commission may make you an Army officer, and promotion to Colonel may make you a senior leader, but neither necessarily make you a professional officer. This we all decide individually. This phenomena - that people are free to choose and normally do what they want - my Dad would say, is the "real problem, and you can't change people...they have to want to change themselves." The PoAC's ongoing dialog must appreciate, if not accept, that this phenomena occurs to some degree regardless of what institutional standards and controls exist. The PoAC's most commonly cited examples of recent issues in our Army bear this out.



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